United Nations

A/56/301

General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 August 2001

Original: English

Fifty-sixth session
Item 27 of the provisional agenda*
Cooperation between the United Nations and the Economic Community of Central African States

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Report of the Secretary-General**

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 55/22 of 10 November 2000, the General Assembly, inter alia, recognized that the purposes and objectives of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are in conformity with the principles and ideals embodied in the Charter of the United Nations; requested the Secretary-General to take the appropriate steps to establish cooperation between the United Nations and ECCAS; and welcomed the support provided by the Secretary-General to the States members of ECCAS in strengthening confidence-building measures at the subregional level and promoting human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions, in implementation of the programme of work of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa.

2. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to continue this support and, within the existing United Nations budget, extend it to all the fields to be covered in the framework of cooperation between the United Nations system and ECCAS, especially the reinforcement of the structures of the Community and the attainment of its objectives in favour of peace and security, democracy and human rights, so as to facilitate the operation of the early-warning mechanism in central Africa as a tool for preventing armed conflicts and to establish a subregional parliament and a subregional centre for human rights and democracy in central Africa to promote democratic values and experience and human rights; emphasized the importance of appropriate coordination between the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, and ECCAS; urged all Member States and the international community to contribute to the efforts of ECCAS to achieve economic integration and development, promote democracy and human rights and consolidate peace and security in central Africa; welcomed and called for the continuation of the efforts made by a number of States, notably in the form of multinational exercises, to enhance the peacekeeping capacities of the States members of ECCAS, so as to enable them to play a larger part in United Nations operations; requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session a report on the implementation of resolution 55/22. At its 84th plenary meeting, on 12 December 2000, the General Assembly,

* A/56/150.

** The delay in submitting this report is due to the lengthy period needed to receive input from various units for compilation and inclusion in the report.

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in its resolution 55/161, decided to invite ECCAS to participate as an observer in its sessions and its work.[1]

3. ECCAS, which has its headquarters in Libreville, was established in 1983, initially with the goals of promoting economic development and integration and fostering a common market among member States of the central African subregion. These goals were later expanded to include efforts to promote peace and security. ECCAS comprises 11 central African States[2] with a combined population of approximately 100 million inhabitants and covers a land area of six million square kilometres. From its inception, ECCAS member States sought to promote and achieve the objectives set until 1992, when the organization became less active and had a significantly lower profile at a time when the region was increasingly facing severe threats and conflicts. The conflicts not only resulted in large numbers of casualties but also generated enormous socio-economic, humanitarian and political consequences, which inhibited progress in the realization of the objectives of ECCAS.

4. Despite the absence of sustained institutional interaction between the United Nations and ECCAS during much of the Community's existence, the Organization worked closely with ECCAS member States, both individually and jointly, in a number of critical areas, including efforts to restore subregional confidence-building and cooperation and to promote peace and reconstruction. With the establishment, in May 1992, at the request of the General Assembly, of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, a mechanism for joint discussion on effective ways and means of addressing the growing threats of instability in the subregion was introduced. Since then, the United Nations, the ECCAS secretariat and regional States have worked closely together, especially in pursuing arms restraint and disarmament in order to contribute to sustainable peace and progress in central Africa.

5. The adoption by the General Assembly of its resolution 55/22 to promote cooperation between the United Nations and ECCAS and its resolution 55/161 giving ECCAS observer status in the General Assembly came against the background of recent initiatives by ECCAS itself to revitalize its operations, especially through the decision by heads of State to set up the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX), an early-warning mechanism to help prevent new conflicts in the subregion, a subregional parliament and a subregional centre for human rights and democracy in central Africa.

6. The present report is submitted in compliance with the Assembly's request in its resolution 55/22 and is based on information received from various departments, offices, bodies, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system. Ultimately, the effectiveness of any cooperation between the United Nations and ECCAS would have to include the support that States Members of the Organization as a whole are prepared to extend to central African States.

II. Action taken by the United Nations system

A. Department of Political Affairs

7. Since the adoption of resolution 55/22, the Deputy Secretary-General for Peace, Security and Humanitarian Affairs of ECCAS has exchanged views on a regular basis with officials of the Department of Political Affairs on ways and means of ensuring peace and security in the subregion. In those discussions, emphasis has been placed on seeking United Nations support to ensure the functioning of the ECCAS Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa, the early-warning mechanism for central Africa (mécanisme d'alerte rapide de l'Afrique centrale (MARAC)) to help prevent new conflicts and the Multinational Force for Central Africa (Force multinationale de l'Afrique centrale (FOMAC)), which could be deployed for the resolution and management of conflicts in the subregion.

8. In the view of the ECCAS secretariat, the long experience and wide expertise of the United Nations in the fields of conflict prevention and crisis management could valuably be tailored to address the peculiar context of central Africa. To that end, ECCAS is of the view that specific United Nations efforts in the consolidation of peace, including through the promotion of democratic governance, the rule of law,

[1] The present report is based on information received as of 30 July 2001. Any replies received after that date will be incorporated in an addendum or addenda to the report.

[2] Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe.

respect for human rights and the advancement of sustainable development, could be particularly helpful in energizing the work of the subregion's early-warning and prevention efforts. It was suggested that once the various subregional peace mechanisms, including COPAX, FOMAC and MARAC, became operational, joint sensitization and training workshops could be envisaged through which appropriate units of the United Nations Secretariat could help strengthen the effective functioning of these institutions.

9. Discussions have also focused on how the United Nations could assist ECCAS, especially COPAX, in dealing with issues of sanctions, embargoes and commissions of inquiry in the search for solutions to conflicts in the subregion.

B. Department of Peacekeeping Operations

10. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and ECCAS held preliminary discussions with a view to establishing closer contacts and developing cooperation in areas of mutual concern. As ECCAS assumes a more active role in regional peacekeeping matters, DPKO will, as with other subregional partners, cooperate with ECCAS for the purposes of sharing and exchanging information, conducting peacekeeping exercises and holding training programmes and related peace support activities. In this regard, the Standby Arrangements Unit has begun briefing ECCAS member States with a view to encouraging their participation in the system, particularly within the framework of peacekeeping operations in central Africa.

11. To date, discussions have been held to that end with the permanent missions to the United Nations of regional States, including Rwanda (26 April 2001) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (14 June 2001), primarily to inform them of the existence of the system and of procedures for their participation in it and in United Nations peacekeeping operations in general.

12. The contacts with the permanent missions have revealed that there is considerable potential for strengthening the subregion's peacekeeping capabilities, although there is limited knowledge of specific aspects of United Nations peacekeeping arrangements, including the standby system. Among the suggestions that emerged from the discussions with the permanent missions, particularly with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda, are the following: visits to Member States by staff of the standby unit should be scheduled; greater cooperation among subregional States on peacekeeping issues should be encouraged as a way of enhancing regional cooperation and confidence-building; even if some Member States cannot provide formed units for peacekeeping operations, the contribution of military observers, staff officers and appropriate personnel for guard and administrative duties would be a good starting point. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is now a member of the Standby Arrangements System.

C. Department for Disarmament Affairs

13. Since May 1992, when the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa was established, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, which serves as the secretariat of the Committee, has worked closely with ECCAS in promoting peace and security in the central African subregion. Cooperation has been strengthened in this regard through the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, based in Lomé.

14. During the period under review, the ECCAS secretariat was invited to the fifteenth ministerial meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee, held in Bujumbura from 16 to 20 April 2001 and to the meeting of experts, held in Libreville from 2 to 5 July 2001, at which States members of the Committee discussed the modalities for the establishment of the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. For its part, the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa is providing assistance to the Governments of Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Chad on a joint weapons collection project aimed at curbing the flow of illicit weapons along their common borders. In addition, the Regional Centre is providing advisory services to ECCAS with regard to the creation of national commissions for weapons collection.

D. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

15. Within the framework of its regional approach, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner

for Human Rights is working in close cooperation with the Department of Political Affairs to set up the United Nations Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa, to be based in Yaoundé. The establishment of the Centre responds to a formal request made by the Governments of ECCAS member States.

16. The initiative for the creation of the Centre was first taken at the fourth ministerial meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee, held in Yaoundé from 7 to 8 April 1994, at which member States recommended the establishment of the Centre, under the auspices of the Office of the High Commissioner, with the following mandate: (i) contribute to the training of Government personnel working in the field of human rights; (ii) support the establishment and/or strengthen national human rights institutions; and (iii) assist in the dissemination and promotion of the wider understanding of international human rights instruments.

17. The General Assembly endorsed the request and added to the mandate of the proposed Centre the development and promotion of a culture of democracy in the subregion. Subsequently, on 4 December 1998 and 1 December 1999, the General Assembly adopted resolutions 53/78 A and 54/55 A, respectively, by which it requested the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner to lend their support to the establishment of the Centre.

18. In June 2000, the Office of the High Commissioner adopted a subregional strategy for central Africa and the Great Lakes region, with, inter alia, the following objectives: (i) intensify dialogue with the secretariat of ECCAS with a view to including human rights on the agenda of its organs and to strengthening its capacities in the field of human rights; (ii) consult with ECCAS regarding the development of a subregional framework plan of action for human rights in central Africa and the Great Lakes region, especially with respect to the human rights of women, children, elders, minorities and human rights defenders; and (iii) support the establishment of a Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.

19. Subsequently, with respect to the proposed establishment of the Centre, the Office of the High Commissioner and the Department of Political Affairs carried out from 4 to 11 June 2000 a joint needs assessment mission to Yaoundé, during which concrete modalities for the establishment of the Centre were worked out.

20. On 15 and 16 March 2001, the first subregional workshop on human rights education in central Africa took place in Yaoundé. The workshop was organized in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon. Forty representatives from Governments, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions, as well as representatives from the ECCAS secretariat, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Department for Disarmament Affairs, attended the workshop.

21. At the conclusion of the workshop, member States adopted a declaration on human rights education in central Africa. The declaration assessed progress made in educational systems at the formal and informal sectors at the national level and in the training of national cadres.

22. Participants also suggested the following priorities for inclusion in the Centre's work programme for the 2001-2002 biennium: (i) the holding of three training workshops for the military, political leaders and national authorities responsible for the preparation and implementation of human rights programmes; (ii) the establishment of a database of existing resources and capacities of the subregion in the field of human rights; (iii) the carrying out of a study to assess existing training programmes in the field of human rights in the subregion; (iv) the development of educational materials for use in schools, extra-curricular activities, the rural environment and the media; and (v) the strengthening of the partnership between the Centre and the ECCAS secretariat.

23. With regard to the partnership with the ECCAS secretariat, the Office of the High Commissioner will seek to build on ongoing dialogue with the Secretary-General and other senior officials of ECCAS with a view to integrating human rights issues in the programmes and activities of ECCAS, especially within COPAX, FOMAC and MARAC.

E. World Food Programme

24. The World Food Programme (WFP) does not have a direct cooperative link with ECCAS, but

cooperative arrangements are ongoing with individual countries in the subregion, including Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe. Furthermore, WFP recently set up an office in Yaoundé to develop and implement an integrated regional programme for the central African subregion. WFP carries out emergency and development programmes, which contribute to ECCAS efforts to achieve economic integration and development, promote democracy and human rights and consolidate peace and security. The programmes provide support to refugees and internally displaced persons and undertake protracted relief and recovery operations in Angola, Burundi, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon and Rwanda.

25. WFP is presently assisting vulnerable persons through its development programmes in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe. It also operates school feeding projects in Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad and Sao Tome and Principe and similar pilot projects are being implemented in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda.

F. World Health Organization

26. The World Health Organization (WHO) does not have direct links with ECCAS, but is very active in the subregion, with its world tuberculosis programme and its massive efforts against diseases of poverty, launched with its partners in 2000, which target HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, all of which are key health issues in Africa. The WHO polio eradication programme is targeting 15 million difficult-to-reach children in conflict zones in Angola, the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, starting in July 2001 with the synchronized National Immunization Days. The initiative has attracted significant private sector and political support to combat the social consequences of diseases of poverty, including childhood diseases in the central African subregion.

G. United Nations Development Programme

27. The United Nations Development Programme is assisting in strengthening ECCAS institutional structures through capacity-building studies, such as those on the establishment of a self-funding autonomous mechanism of institutions of integration in central Africa, and the operationalization of new structures. A draft document on the reinforcement of the capacities of ECCAS is being elaborated. The aim of the project, which is to be financed mostly by UNDP, is to revive the integration process in the subregion through the reinforcement of institutions. The project would also require collaboration by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and OAU.

28. Project RAF/99/016, entitled "Regional report on human development in Central and Western Africa", is an initial phase in the assessment of world reports on human development in order to analyse the impact and the validity of this tool from an African perspective and to make recommendations that could be useful in the preparation of future world reports. It also anticipates the participation of a large number of regional economic organizations in order to shed light on the importance of regional integration in meeting the challenges of globalization. Two working committees have been established, which met for the first time on 18 May 2001.

H. United Nations Environment Programme

29. ECCAS, with the support and close collaboration of the United Nations Environment Programme, is preparing the meeting of the Subregional Preparatory Committee for Central Africa for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, scheduled to be held in Libreville from 17 to 19 September 2001.

I. Economic Commission for Africa

30. The Economic Commission for Africa, jointly with OAU, serviced the negotiations that led to the establishment in 1983 of ECCAS. Subsequently, ECA implemented the UNDP-funded multi-sectoral project on assistance to ECCAS from 1989 to 1993. In 1998, ECA was requested to launch the process of

revitalizing ECCAS. However, given limited resources, the secretariat has relied on the assistance of partners such as ECA to carry out this task.

31. In this regard, the Secretary-General of ECCAS and his Deputy have undertaken several visits to ECA headquarters in Addis Ababa for discussions with the Executive Secretary and the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECA. Additional contacts have taken place in the margins of various regional conferences in Abuja, Tripoli and Algiers. ECA is also assisting in preparing the project document that is being used by ECCAS for securing UNDP financial assistance. To that end, the ECCAS secretariat has requested ECA to help carry out the following activities: (i) prepare two studies on the establishment of a self-financing mechanism for ECCAS and a compensation system for the loss of revenue likely to result from the trade liberalization scheme. The two studies were completed in 2000 and approved by the ECCAS Council of Ministers in Libreville in February 2001. ECA assistance is needed for the operationalization of the recommendations of the studies; (ii) prepare a study on a trade liberalization scheme; (iii) prepare a study on the revitalization of the Central African Clearing House; (iv) strengthen the capacities of the ECCAS secretariat and those of its member States in analysis, negotiations and formulation of sound integration policies, including the creation of a web site at the secretariat; (v) provide assistance for the revitalization of the Central African Federation of Chambers of Commerce; (vi) evaluate and strengthen the Network of Women of Central Africa with a view to making it a viable specialized institution of ECCAS; (vii) undertake a study on the establishment of the ECCAS cooperation fund; and (viii) prepare a study on economic convergence criteria.

32. In order to structure and guide their future cooperation more effectively, the ECCAS secretariat and ECA are considering the signing of a joint memorandum of understanding.